FAMILY TIES: REPRESENTING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH POLITICAL POETRY

A Senior Honors Thesis

By

LORI L. LEE

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs
& Academic Scholarships
Texas A&M University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE
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Group:

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ABSTRACT

Family Ties: Representing the Relationships Between Parents and Children in Contemporary Irish Political Poetry. (April 2000)

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The implications of Irish historical occurrences such as the colonization of the Irish by the English, the partial independence achieved by the Irish in 1922, the subsequent splitting of the island into two separate sections, along with the independence movement of the Irish since 1969 have been left obvious and important influences on the writings of some of the most significant Irish poets since W.B. Yeats. The tendency of the post-Independence generation of Ireland is to epitomize post-revolution nostalgia, idealizing the previous generations' attempt to reclaim their country. Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland, both from the generation immediately following Irish independence, are sentimental in their portrayals of their parents, and the nostalgia and idealism common to their generation is apparent in their poetry. Important elements in the nostalgic depictions of the generation are the traditional roles of the Irish, not only in the domestic realm but also in occupations and in society in general. Boland and Heaney use the idealized model of the traditional Irish family to

represent the Irish nation, describing through personal experience a national significance. This is in contrast to Paul Muldoon, who was born the generation after Boland and Heaney and represents a different viewpoint in his poetry. His view of both nation and family are much more ambivalent, not defining either as ultimately ideal. Though Muldoon does share many of the same concerns as his counterparts, including the disappearance of the Irish tradition due to colonization and emigration, he refuses to solely review the heroics of a nation by depicting them through idyllic images of family. Instead, at times, he presents less flattering images such the one of a woman in the last stages of a hunger strike. Images such as this one are used in order to question the purpose of suffering for such an ambiguous concept as nation. Separated from the move for independence by more than one generation, Muldoon is distanced enough from the efforts to allow for analysis and review of not just the concept of nation and its importance, but also of the stereotypical roles of the family in traditional Ireland.

Dedicated to Mandy, Tamara, and Kelly-

This is the only page of this damn thesis that I had to edit because it was too long. This is all so strange because I feel like I'm at the top of a mountain looking down. Not just because of this thesis, but because of this whole college experience. I can't leave this pinnacle until I say a few things to the people who brought me here. Unknowingly, each of you, in your own way, taught me (or at least led me by the hand to) the meaning of my life. What better compliment could I pay my friends than that?

M*andy*- Where would I be today if you had not taught me that some of the coolest people on earth are the ones who clean the floors and windows? I hope *you* know the value of the lesson you've taught me: that loving someone for their heart and soul is what it's all about. I thank you and owe you for some of the best times of my life.

Tamara- My God, I can not imagine my life without you. You tried for years to teach me the lesson that finally sunk in: that I can only be loved as much as I love myself. It was you I thought of when I began to realize how incredible I can be if I want to be. I don't know if that's because you're the second most arrogant person on earth, or because it was essentially you all along trying to tell me that. I thank you because you made me able to understand family before I knew what family was.

Kelly- I would still be in the dark if you had not been there that night to say, "Look for the good things." It has made such a difference in my life; I think, I hope, you've seen that. You never gave up on me, and I don't know how to repay that. Someday maybe I will. You were all there even when you thought you weren't. I love my life because of what I've learned from you.

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INTRODUCTION

In America, they are members of what has recently been termed "The Greatest Generation." Struggling through the Great Depression and World War II, the generation that ended "The Great War" is looked upon with patriotism and nostalgia as the heroic defenders of freedom. Those who pay tribute to their acts of heroism refer to them with fondness and gratefulness. History has recorded them as the Americans who embody standards such as duty, honor, courage, service, and valor.

America's view of "The Greatest Generation" is not uncommon, seeing that nostalgia almost always accompanies the remembrances of countrymen who have risen up in arms in defense of their nation, especially when lives are lost in such acts. The post-Independence generation of Ireland epitomizes this type of nostalgia, idealizing the previous generations' attempt to reclaim their country. Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland, both from the generation immediately following Irish independence, are sentimental in their portrayals of their parents, and the nostalgia and idealism common to their generation is apparent in their poetry. Important elements in the nostalgic depictions of the generation are the traditional roles of the Irish, not only in the domestic realm but also in occupations. Boland and Heaney use the idealized model of the traditional Irish family to represent the Irish nation, describing through personal experience a national significance.

Paul Muldoon, who was born the generation after Boland and Heaney, however, represents a different viewpoint in his poetry. His view of both nation and family are much more ambivalent, not defining either as ultimately ideal. Though

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This thesis follows the format and style of *The MLA Handbook.*

Muldoon does share many of the same concerns as his counterparts, including the disappearance of the Irish tradition due to colonization and emigration, he refuses to solely review the heroics of a nation by depicting them through idyllic images of family. Instead, he chooses at times to present much less flattering images such the one present in his poem, "Aisling," of a woman in the last stages of a hunger strike. Images such as this one are present in order to question the purpose of suffering for such an ambiguous concept as nation. Separated from the move for independence by more than one generation, Muldoon is distanced enough from the efforts to allow for analysis and review of not just the concept of nation and its importance, but also of the stereotypical roles of the family and of traditional Ireland.

A POETIC HISTORY OF IRELAND AND THE DIFFERENT POINTS OF REFERENCE

"There are dying arts," Eavan Boland wrote in her poem, "The Parcel," "and one of them is the way my mother used to make up a parcel " (1-3). In her poem, Boland describes with intricacy and detail the process by which her mother prepared a package for mail, from the unrolling of the coarse paper to the last review of the parcel as it was dropped into the burlap bag. Her careful poetic description parallels the manner in which the packing process took place: smaller pieces forming the whole, with the formality of "all business, all distance" (9).

This description of Boland's mother performing a daily task, "her hair dishevelled, her tongue between her teeth, " though endearing, is not unique (25). Irish poets such as Paul Muldoon and Seamus Heaney also use the familiarities of their family as a source of inspiration for creative work. Remembrances of their parents form the subjects for their poetry, converting everyday and familiar experiences into a means of expressing more expansive concepts, allowing their reflections to speak of much more than the subject at hand, their poems metaphoric vehicles for implicit discussions of Ireland as a nation.

It is by way of the familiar that these poets fully explore the depths of the Irish past. The family, though it appears as an unrelated topic within the poetry, is a vehicle used to express emotions and perceptions of Ireland and its history. The poets write from separate places within Irish history, explaining the conflicts of Ireland metaphorically in their own roles as parents or as a child. The implications of the Irish

historical occurrences that have taken place in Ireland feed into how the poets express their relations and their nation's past. For instance, Heaney and Muldoon write from a different historical perspective, not only because they are male, but also because they are more effected by the partial independence achieved by Ireland in 1922. The partial independence of 1922 subsequently split Ireland into two separate portions: the North, which remains under British rule, and the South, which is its own independent state. In 1969, a movement towards independence reemerged, initiating more violence in Ireland. Both poets, who have resided in the North since the new movement for independence, have witnessed the violence and their poetry reflects the tensions felt from the on going struggle there.

Boland, on the contrary, who resided in the South, was much less affected by the new outbreak of violence. As a woman poet, she is also more centered on society's rendering of women throughout time and explores her ancestry in Ireland. In doing that, her writing often investigates events of history which occurred in the 1800's and before. She concentrates on the suffering that resulted from the potato famine in the 1850's, the emigration that followed, and the place of women in those events. She explores the effects of the brutal colonization of Ireland by England and the racial stereotypes that derived from their takeover, paralleling the hegemony of England over Ireland to the patriarchal Irish society and the oppression of women. It becomes obvious when analyzing these poets' work about their family that a great deal is spoken regarding these historical events and how it alters the individual poets' perception of their nation.

Seamus Heaney, for example in "Digging," explains his disappointment in himself for not becoming a potato farmer as his father had done while inadvertently expressing his inability to commit to a traditional occupation of an Irish man. These feelings are expressed by Paul Muldoon, as well, and derive, of course, from the stereotypical role of men in Ireland. When Heaney replays in his mind his father's interrogation of his poetry, Heaney begins to fight disillusionment with his very own art form, again, expanding the conflict to a national level, and asking himself if he has made any progress for his country the way those men who took part in the rebellion did.

Paul Muldoon, who was born a generation after Boland and Heaney, similarly addresses his relationship with his father. In that act, he contests many of the customary approaches previous generations take in examining their parents. His poetry reveals a different attitude towards the past conflicts of the nation. He is distanced enough from colonial Ireland and the reverent attitudes of former generations to question common sentiment toward the independence movement. His father's questioning the content of his poetry forces Muldoon to review his purpose in writing, and he finds himself under the burden of art.

The poetry of Muldoon, Heaney and Boland all derive from different points of reference and consequently provide important frameworks in reviewing Ireland's conflicts for varying people and generations. Particularly of value in analyzing and comparing the poetry of these three writers is the unique sense of varying Irish sentiments, especially explored through traditional icons and norms of the culture.

Through these varying sentiments, revealed through poetry on the subject of parents and children, the collective conflict experienced by Ireland as a nation is explored, dissecting and revealing the underground conscience. The surface level conflict in the poetry, between parent and child, is familiar, personal, and therefore comprehendible, approaching and softening the complex and multi-layered discussion of the Irish experience which the relationships personify. By representing the topic of Irish conflict contained in these personal relationships, *Irish-ness* becomes comprehensible. Though it is a personal experience they describe, it is a national significance they depict.

The concept itself, of using the relationships of parents and children as a means for expressing the collective Irish conflict and experience, serves the same purpose as an objective correlative does in poetry. The feeling accordingly derived from the poem regarding the relationship between parent and child is indicative of the emotion the poet possesses regarding particular Irish experiences. As the relationship differs from poem to poem and from poet to poet, so does the sentiment from differing experiences related to their country.

OVER THE THRESHOLD: THE POETRY OF EAVAN BOLAND

Boland writes from the same generation of as Heaney, and likewise reflects the mawkish impressions of their generation. Boland's viewpoint differs because she is female and she views herself as being absent from the political action of Ireland over the last few decades because she is female. Maudlin and reverent, Boland's perception of her mother reflects a desire to maintain the traditional role of wife and mother in her nation. Contrary to her acceptance of that role, however, Boland struggles against society's dismissal of her as a poet (because she is a woman). Being a woman in Ireland and being a poet are mutally exclusive, Boland explains. Addressing both of these roles, in "Anna Liffey," Boland is obviously frustrated, but nevertheless insists on finding a means to harmony.

The resolution Boland discovers is presented within an image in her poetry, an image which emerges time and time again. This image is a quiet, solitary and nameless woman in a doorway. In "Anna Liffey," the woman in the doorway emerges, her figure perfectly outlined by the darkness in contrast to the warm house light on her back as she steps out into the winter dusk. The woman takes on different forms; in some of Boland's poems, this woman in the doorway appears young and blissful, leaning "down to catch a child who has run into her arms"$_1$ (10-13) or calling out the names of her children, "one name. Then the other one. / The beautiful vowels sounding out home"$_2$ (54-55). Always, the mysterious figure is distinctively Irish, and in her youth, she appears wearing "the colours that go with red hair$_3$" (23). Other times she appears later in life, aged and wise. Her hair is then a softer shade and is no

longer red. She is more contemplative, looking out of her home and reflecting on the way the moths shimmer in the kitchen light$_4$, apples ripen in the darkness, and the feeling of melancholy of growing older in the Irish winter as it moves in like rain$_5$.

This woman in the doorway, however, is not Anna Liffey, *Life*, the namesake of the poem, as "the story goes" (1). Rather, Anna Liffey, the legend says, is a woman who came to Kildare and "loved the flatlands and the ditches and the unreachable horizon" (4-5). Liffey was said to have cherished the landscape so that she requested that it be named for her. And so it was. Significant to the tale that Boland tells is that Anna Liffey, the woman, like the river that carved Dublin, is merely an Irish image from a legend, not to be questioned or deepened. Never is she present as a real force, as a subject rather than an object. The reader is confronted with the flatness of an Irish legend in the same form it originated from in the nineteenth-century: stereotypical, lacking any shape or depth, and Romantic. At first glance, it appears simple and harmless because a woman transformed into an image for the sake of a legend is common in Irish literature.

In contrast to the legend of how the river was named, however, the woman in the doorway of a house, the repeated image in Boland's poetry, materializes. The woman in the doorway appears as an ominous figure announcing foreboding evil, her presence a cautionary note that something is amiss. The Irish tradition between the actuality of *Life*, or a person's being, and the legend that trails a life is the wrongdoing the woman in the doorway points to. The poem is representative of the thing that

Boland most resents in Irish art forms: the conversion of subjects or lives, into objects or art forms.

Boland transforms the legend of Anna Liffey into a critique of the Irish tradition that replaces the details of women's lives with the legends into which art forms them. Eliminating the actuality of women in their active and complex state and then converting them into single, simple pieces of stagnancy is how Liffey and others like her become nothing more than passive figures for the world to admire. Women transformed into art exist only as legends, images, or, even more sadly, myths.

The idea that there is an on-going oppression of women in Irish history that is "infected by its national tradition" seems to plague Boland, as she explains in her book of prose, Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time (hereafter referred to as OL) (196). Ireland uses the woman not as a counterpart to the men in battle but as a mere figure: a political emblem which functions as an inspiration towards violence and action. The image of Kathleen ni Houlihan, for instance, much like the idea of Anna Liffey, became a figure of representation for Ireland instead of a living part of it. In many of the portraits of Kathleen ni Houlihan, she was dissected in order to represent her country: the color of her hair was indicative of the fertility of the land, the listless look of her eyes illustrative of the loss to the English, her hands holding the harp in the tradition of the Irish artists.

Commonly using Kathleen ni Houlihan and other women as blazons and dwelling primarily upon clichéd similes about their body parts, the Irish tradition, instead of focusing on the being who exists in possession of the parts, thoughtlessly

objectifies the woman as a sort of catalogue of physical attributes (Cuddon 97-98). This is Boland's primary complaint against the representation of women in the Irish tradition, that they experience loss of subjectivity by way of the narratives of the nation. They are offered as stagnant, unchanging, unthreatening objects. They transform from people to pieces, into portraits, sculptures, legends, and the inspiration for revolution.

The "double exposure" of the woman in Irish art, the "nationalization of the feminine, the feminization of the national," drains Boland (Boland, OL 65). It is "a dark violence" blurred by the stereotypes of "Victorian sentiment" (64) that has taken her "a lifetime/ To claim" as Boland wrote in "Anna Liffey" (44-46). Still, even after years of struggle, she has only been able to muster the strength to claim "fractions" of her life (46). She overcame the temptation to withdraw into the simplicity of the Irish heroine she had encountered numerous times:

> ...utterly passive... She was invoked, addressed, remembered, loved, regretted. And, most important, died for. She was a mother or a virgin... Her flesh was wood or ink or marble. And she had no speaking part. If her harvests were spoiled, her mother tongue wiped out, her children killed, then it was for someone else to mark the reality. Her identity was as an image. (66)

While the male became the figure of action and glory, the women were continually presented as "devalued subject matter," in reality and also alongside their historical representation (Boland, OL 217, 204). The image was that of "intense passivity of the female" (66). As "myth is instructed by history," (174), this representation of women in "a series of fixed and glittering objects...which could not

age," signified the treatment of women throughout Irish history and also assigned them the task of being art, "being simply mute and beautiful" (216). By denying these women the ability to age, they are being denied the ability to die, thus making them more like objects of art. This representation had simply imitated the traditional Irish ideal of the woman as the "angel in the house," and though something was being gained by "the imagery and emblem of the national muse," this gain occurred "only at an aesthetic level," confining the woman to the role of mother and homemaker and devaluing her on multiple levels (174).

Boland combats the use of women as objects by inserting the woman in the doorway into the poem. The woman in the doorway, "in the city of her birth," above the river which took it's name from a woman, contrasts the objectified idea of Liffey (10). She is not the age of the ideal young woman of Irish legend. Womanhood, rather than legend, intersects the poem. This is not surprising considering that in the forth section of the poem, the author's thoughts come to light: "If I could see myself / I would see / A woman in a doorway" (20-22).

As the author, Boland has introduced herself into the context of the legend. She explains that Ireland was a nation that eluded her, and there were "fractions of a life / it has taken me a lifetime to claim" (45-47). It was not until the birth of her children when she began to feel that her nation "took hold" of her (51). As the poem advises, Boland was forced to "make a nation what you will / make of the past / what you can-" (57-59). In an attempt to claim her history, Boland struggled against the constructs of her nation and past. By becoming a part of the legend (and thus the

poem), Boland is resolving the problem of the lack of women in legends of the past. She goes to the poetic past and struggles against its norms, injecting herself and therefore influencing the type of legends to come.

The power of the poem is in the question it raises: how does a woman poet go about changing history, despite years of established dogma? Boland suggests that the only means to do so is to go beyond the limits of narration. It is the action of becoming a mother in the poem, and in life, more than any other defining action, which Boland believes frees the woman in the doorway (who actually *is* Boland) from the silence of the past. Boland suggests with this idea that the power to bring another being into the world, a powerful ability, along with the power to leave "a story" behind for the child to retell, changes all of existence. Her being a mother and a poet, consequently, forces an image into the poem: the woman in the doorway. The act of bringing both poetry and children into existence forces a change in the world and a change in the legend; hence a different subject is planted into the poem. The new figure inserted into the legend is a middle-aged mother who represents women at a unique point in their lives, put there by the actions and poetry of Eavan Boland. She stands in the doorway of her suburban home, calling her children in from the dusk. Far from the typical female object in poetry which Boland had critiqued, this woman is a woman who has grown older in the poem. She is not the stagnant, stereotypical maiden which is usually present, nor is she the "angel in the house." Rather, she is a woman who represents a reality of changing, even negatively, as one grows older. She

is a woman at a different point in her life, indicative of the subject Boland had always searched for in literature[6] (14).

The presentation of the woman in the doorway is extremely pertinent. She emerges there because the doorway is demonstrative of liminality, of a place of change or a stage of movement from one area to another. The state of liminality, of being between the traditional image of women and the new one Boland has created, is symbolic of the changes Boland sees women making in society. No longer is the woman present in poems merely as a young and beautiful image created to admire and too fix in time, but she is a figure of reality with voice and action. She is a poet and a mother in suburbia, placed in a poem, breaking down the image of the idealized "angel in the house." The woman in the poem has stepped into the doorway and out of the cliché, rippling the change of artistic expression of women. The "angel in the house" is literally stepping over the threshold, out of the house.

This woman in the doorway is the figure for which Boland searched early in her life, when she scanned the glossy pages of a large, leather-bound book. She looked past the images of the woman on a throne, holding a harp, instead searching for a woman who existed as those familiar to her did. She searched for images of her homeland and the hero in her history and the Irish past. Years later, she read the stories of Irish history, but instead, that time, removed that male hero from that story. Analyzing what remained, she questioned "what female figure was there to identify with" (OL 66). "Gradually, in inches, not yards," after reading the idealized poems, speeches, and ballads of the nineteenth century, Boland began to realize the "ugly

limits" of this history (65). Without the hero of the story, there was nothing left to admire. She wrote, realizing the lack of female accounts, "I was a teenage girl, looking not just to admire but to belong...Yet how could I belong to these actions, dreamed up by men and carried out by them?" (65).

Boland finds that women in Irish history like her grandmother, have been left without a voice, without a place. Their silent journeys were dismissed in order to portray them as "the passive images of Ireland- the queen, the silver stamp" (OL 67). Boland, recognizing these traditions of the "nation which eludes" her becomes the figure of female progress in Ireland.

It was a cold, Irish afternoon when Eavan Boland drove to the nearby graveyard where her grandmother was buried. Through the iron gates of the cemetery she saw the small bits of scattered granite, none of which "was bigger than a man's head" (OL 22). Most of the pieces were unpolished and unmarked, yet "in the heartbroken vernacular of the place, each one stood in for a life, a death" (22). She searched through the pieces, feeling and looking for some sign of her name on the stones, but to no avail. Disturbed, it suddenly "seemed of enormous, irrational importance" to the poet that she should find her grandmother's name inscribed somewhere (22). She left the cemetery with no sign of her grandmother's life or death, feeling "the small, abstract wound" (22).

Why was the inscription of the woman's name on a stone so important to the poet? Perhaps because the lack of inscription was, to Boland, a tangible representation of the Irish woman's lack of "a name" in history. Boland realizes a lack of

recognition of the women who came before her, women who were fundamentally voiceless, irrelevant pieces of the past. The scattered stones in the graveyard, one among them a careless headstone for her grandmother, signifies the lack of meaning of these peoples' lives and deaths. It is a thought that strikes fear in the poet: a historical fate of obliteration.

"Legends," the poem Boland dedicates to her daughter, Eavan Frances, embodies the resolution of this absence. Once again, the poet returns to the relationship of mother and child in order to process the conflict of her personal Irish experience. Boland explains in her poem that "our children are our legends" (9). This resists the Irish literary tradition and contrasts the image of the legend that Boland has already critiqued: that of ideally aged, stagnant and simple women. Though she resents the country that has eluded her for years and the struggle she has fought in order to maintain a voice within Ireland, her poetry and her daughter resolve the battle. Her daughter, her ripple that causes change in the world and will cease the limits of the poet's own narration, eases the tension of the nothingness which comes of so many women's lives. Her poetry will remain after her death, and her daughter will relive the poems, with "no tears in these" (2). Boland concludes the poem with a tribute to her life as a mother and poet: "You are mine. You have my name. / My hair was once like yours. / And the world is less bitter to me because you will retell the story" (12-14). To mothers, Irish legends are not the repeated meaningless tales of idealized male figures, but rather the children they have brought into their country.

Boland does not, at any point, resent or critique the role of traditional mother and housewife in Irish culture, a role to which women in Ireland are commonly relegated. She is actually quite reverent about these roles, admiring her mother's generation and the traditional Irish values characteristic of that generation. Similarly, Heaney writes an idealized version of that same generation. Both poets view the traditional professions and gender roles of their parents as romantic and include in their poetry a depiction of their parents as artists, customary to the longstanding principle of Ireland as a nation of artists.

Though "The Parcel" describes the everyday task of making up a package for mail, Boland's romanticization of the generation of her parents leads her to view her mother's actions as traditional and romantic. Her mother fulfills the role of the traditional Irish woman, representing all the characteristics of the "angel in the house:" caring for the details of the home and of the country. By drawing from Boland's poetry about her mother and the way her mother identifies and labels the destination of the package, one can detect that Boland's mother metaphorically, by way of her role as the traditional Irish woman, which instigates and identifies the direction of her people. She upholds the traditional frames of women in society and traditional gender roles, and through her poetry, Boland's ideals of the nature of Irish culture are revealed.

SEAMUS HEANEY: CASUALTY AND *EVERYMAN*

Heaney's depiction of his father at work also includes attitudes towards previous generations and a nostalgic view of the people and roles of those generations. There is something quite romantic about the way Heaney describes his father's trade in the poem "Digging." The boot is not merely positioned on the top of the shovel, it is "nestled" there, with the shaft of the shovel pressing against the inside of the knee (10). This provides leverage for longer and more efficient hours of potato digging. This is how the tall tops are "rooted out," drawing out the fruit of the crop with them (12). The new potatoes are then scattered after the farmer picks them out of the sod, "loving their cool hardness" in his hands (14).

Very obvious is the dignity that Heaney feels this type of work possesses, explaining with tenderness the tediousness of the labor much in the way Boland does her mother's in "The Parcel." The "clean rasping sound" (3) of the blade slicing the ground forces a picture of Heaney's father, twenty years earlier, into his imagination as a "professor of a magical strength and skill" (Parker 1). In this imaginative picture, his father is the representation of the Irish farmer, working long and hard hours in the potato fields, straining and stooping in rhythm, "an elegiac presence" like some "ancient hero" (Parker 1). Heaney's presentation of his father "twenty years away" from the present time allows the subject to occupy two time periods at once, like a mythical figure, ultra-glorified, uniting his father's present figure in the flowerbed and the romanticized image of him in the potato field in his imagination (7).

By this means, Heaney's father transforms into more than just an adulated Irish farmer. Instead, the poet allows the figure to span time, portraying him as the Irish *Everyman*. Though his father would've lived a generation or more after the famine, he nonetheless represents those tenants of the English Lord, the potato farmers that later barely survive the famine. He appears as the father, the caregiver, and the unknowingly romantic symbol of the true Irishman whom Heaney believes him to be. He not only performs the most traditional of all Irish occupations, he does so in the spirit of the Irish artist, removing the spuds from the ground with the talent and anticipation of a sculptor completing a statue. Heaney engages an Irish ideal of "a country of artists," his father personifying a part of this history of Ireland.

Heaney concludes his poem by explaining that he is without a spade to follow the actions of his father and grandfather. In the poem, he reflects on the images of both of them like figures "from a lost world," and, with admiration, comments, "By God, the old man could handle a spade. / Just like his old man" (Parker 1). The arduous and wrenching Irish tradition of potato farming had been handed down from his grandfather to his father and, with respect for that tradition, his father had followed in what Heaney represents as grandeur of the occupation. But the tradition ended with his father, as Heaney suggests he is unable of continuing the tasks. His thoughts express:

> images and allusions ... of love and admiration, but are also
> a product of separation, a distance, born of time and education,
> which the young man half regrets (Parker 1).

A "squat pen" is all that rests in Heaney's hand; he is forced to "dig with it" (30-31).

The conclusion of the poem evokes a sense of remorse in Heaney in what seems to be "a focus for his own mourning of change" along with a sense of sadness in his inability to fulfill the expectations of the Irish tradition (Parker 1). He especially portrays the idealistic national communal past, but, entering history from a different place, chooses alternatives to the traditional roles his father played. It is ironic that Heaney views himself as someone who failed to fulfill the role of the traditional Irishman considering that Heaney, as "Ireland's poet," is the ideal representation of the Irish artist. He seems to fail to recognize his place as a participant in the stereotypical role of the Irishman as an artist. Instead, his craft is presented in his eyes as part of the destruction of traditional Ireland. This could stem from Heaney's own admiration of his father, which is evident in poems like "Casualty." Heaney wrote of his father, announcing "I loved his whole manner, / Sure-footed but too sly, / His deadpan sidling tact, / His fisherman's quick eye / And turned observant back" (16-19).

Relations between the two appear to have been strained, however. Heaney wrote in the same poem that his "other life," that of a poet, was "incomprehensible" to his father (20-21). In fact, when his father, "too busy with his knife at a tobacco plug," would attempt to discuss this other life with Heaney, the poet "would manage by some trick / To switch the talk to eels / Or lore of the horse and cart / Or the Provisionals" (27, 31-34). Heaney is unable to confront the issue that his father keeps approaching, though the reader is left without knowing exactly what the question is. One can speculate that Heaney's father wants to know why he chose the profession. Perhaps

Heaney avoids the conversation for fear of not being able to answer why he writes, to answer why there is a division within him. The division is that his choice and occupation is that of the poet, but the nagging intuition that haunts him is that he was unable to continue the tradition of his father's occupation.

Heaney appears to be representing the Irish people here. Ireland is progressing and allowing more alternatives within the society than the previously strict gender roles. Heaney, the perfect Irishman, the poet and artist representing his country free from the generic norms of his society, represents this. On the other hand, Ireland regrets losing its past and the traditional standards represented by the traditional Irish potato farmer that Heaney chose not to fulfill. Though Heaney is a success, he is also a failure in his own eyes for not fulfilling both Irish traditions, traditions that appear mutually exclusive in Heaney's perception. Heaney and the country, therefore, are divided on their view of how Ireland should be progressing.

He concludes his poem, "Casualty," about the death and burial of his father, with an image of his father's casket moving, "slow mile by mile," towards the cemetery, as if he were in the potato fields again (109). His father appears as an eternal figure of Old Ireland, but he is disappearing into the mist as he plods down the row of the garden. Reverent of his father's opinion of him, Heaney remembers him romantically as this idealized potato farmer, as a "plodder through midnight rain" (112). His father's interrogation of his occupation had bothered him in life, and yet Heaney seems to have yearned for the conflict, wondering why he chose to be a poet.

After his father's death, he questions his own actions again, begging his father, "Question me again" (113).

This may be why Heaney feels obligated to address politics in his poetry: in order to resolve the conflict between his role as a poet and his role as a representative of the Irish tradition represented by his father. Heaney's ideas of these expectations are directly related to Heaney's nostalgic view of his father's generation and they contemplate the idealism of the sentiment following independence. Heaney's political response to Irish violence of the North reveals a different, much more disillusioned feeling than his father held. His perspective on the meaning and purpose of poetry, not nearly as maudlin or reverent as his previous ideas, is blurred. In fact, he addressed his own work and considers his obligation to address the violence in his poem "Whatever You Say Say Nothing." Heaney feels threatened by "the dangerous tide that followed Seamus" because he feels incapable of reacting appropriately (30). With an entire nation prepared to form him into an icon, Heaney contemplates whether his own opinions should become those of a nation's.

The politics in his poetry echoes that of Yeat's "Man and Echo," in which Yeats questions whether his poetry had inspired "certain men" to violence. Heaney finds that his own art form seems to have become the cliché for the Irish verse, and though he does not address whether it has caused violence, he does question his authority as to whether his work should be used as an identity at all. He seeks to answer whether there is any link to *original Irish sentiment*, the sentiment of the generations before him. Current art forms seem to follow only the form of his poetry,

a leadership position Heaney is not necessarily willing to accept, as even he wonders how much of his work has been affected by the media's interpretation of the violence in Ireland. He questions whether the brutalities he has seen and written about in poetry were real at all, or just his remembrance of "deja-vu, some film made" (57-58). He returns to the reverence of the idea of the Ireland as a nation of artists and seeks to answer if his own poetry has aided in the destruction of his country's communal unconscious Irish conceptions.

Boland similarly addresses the disappearance of Old Ireland in her poem "The Parcel," equating it to the dropping of the package into a burlap sack (and thus the inability to see it anymore). Boland's mother, much like Heaney's father, is a representative of the Irish artist. She creates her art in the making up of a parcel, an everyday task of the Irish female. Once again, it is the traditional task of her mother presented in idealized form as an Irish artist that makes the notion of her mother's generation a nostalgic one. Like Heaney's poem, Boland's romanticizes a craft and idealizes it. With the death of the art, with the completion of her mother's task, comes the disappearance of the Irish culture. Her mother represented the Irish woman, caring for the details of the home and of the country: identifying the destination of the package the same way their occupations as "angels of the house" allowed the Irish "identify" the direction of the people, or to uphold traditional gender roles.

Boland reiterates this point in her poem "In a Bad Light." Written about the immigration of Irish women into America in 1860, it reflects on the loss of Irish culture. In a museum, the poet sees a replica of a New Orleans steamboat, and in the

bright, wonderful sunlight of the bow stands a woman in fine silk clothing made by Irish seamstresses. What underlies the scene, however, is that "there is always a nightmare. Even in such light" (5). That nightmare is the "oil-lit" parlour, several floors below the deck, where the Irish seamstresses work on the clothing, "bent over / in a bad light" (21, 25-26). Each stitch they make signifies the greater distance from their homeland, where "the weather must be cold now," where "the inklings of winter" are beginning to emerge (6,8). They were forced to leave their country because of strife and their exile accompanies the disintegration of traditional Ireland which both Boland and Heaney desire to preserve.

Boland's remorse comes from the sense that the nation died with the steamships that carried away the Irish women to jobs as seamstresses in American, and with outdated trains which made the depots forgotten. With the implementation of the English language in place of the Irish, the island became unrecognizable. The direction the Irish were traveling as a nation became unclear, and the consolidation of the people dissolved. Boland's depiction of remorse at the conclusion of her poem does not derive from feelings of personal expectations she was unable to fill, but of a loss of the Irish tradition by means of assimilation. In contrast to Heaney, she seems to embrace the ideal that her art is a means to continue the Irish tradition, that she is a participant in the stereotypical role of Irish tradition as an artist.

BOLAND AND HEANEY: FIXING THE PROBLEM

In Object Lessons, after reviewing the actions of the English colonizer within the culture of the Irish, Boland concludes that "safety is not a place but a language" (51). When the English enforced their stereotypes on the colonized, the colonizer used the power of language to fix "the other," or the colonized, in time. By freezing the colonized in a particular point in time with the use of these discriminatory stereotypes, the colonizer has transformed a group of individuals into a point of reference for all people of that group. Labeling people in certain terms- lazy, drunkards, hot-headed- and fixes them, offering the oppressor "*at any one time,* a *secure* point of identification" so that the colonizer does not have to worry about what the group will do next (Bhabha 69). Language, in other words, offers power of one group over another by limiting the ability of the oppressed group to change. This type of discourse, affixing verbal differentiation, is necessary in order for the colonizer to not only retain control, but to limit the threat of the colonized (Bhabha 75).

The verbalization of difference "turns the colonial subject into a misfit- a grotesque mimicry or 'doubling' that threatens to split" the sentiments of the colonized over them (Bhabha 75). The colonizer feels the need to build a verbal barrier between the colonized and themselves, because they colonized represents what the colonizer fears most: a loss of power. Yet, there exists a "split" in the colonizer because those people so foreign and unfamiliar to them also appear exotic and enticing, causing the colonizer to form a fetish for the colonized (74). This relationship is possible in all groups where a power differentiation exists, as is evidenced by Boland's description of

the Irish traditionally patriarchal society. The stereotyping of woman as chaste, young, beautiful and submissive functions as a means of social control. When Boland requests "I want a poem / I can grow old in"[6] she is referring to the constant presentation of women in art, especially poetry, as the stereotypical idealized young female, an ever-present force in contrast to her woman in the doorway. Boland explores the loss of realistic female identity within the narratives of the nation, her concerns echoing throughout her poems.

As outsiders and observers of their parent's generation rather than members of it, ironically enough, Boland and Heaney both take advantage of the technique of stereotypical discourse. Allowed to characterize, stereotype, or fix, the generation without ever actually taking part in it, they both idealize the traditional roles fulfilled by their parents' generation. Fixing the generation in time in this manner forces it to be unchangeable and simple, heightening their ability to reminisce about it. Interesting is the way Heaney simply observes the generation and it's norms, not willing to question or analyze the stereotypes within it. Yet, Heaney chooses to remain an outside part of it by not even attempting to fulfill the traditional role that his father did.

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: PAUL MULDOON

In contrast to the traditional values of Heaney and Boland is the poet Paul Muldoon. Perhaps the difference in the portrayal of the parent exists because Muldoon is a part of the generation following Heaney and Boland's. It is a generation no longer nostalgic but rather disillusioned by the idealism of former generations. For Muldoon, the distance from the rebellion creates an ability to examine the pre-set Irish roles and stereotypes, shaping it to his own generation's thoughts and feelings. He is not restrained by the fixation of the former generations the way Heaney and Boland are.

His poem, "The Fox," written shortly after the loss of his own mother, is evidence of this, written about a dream the narrator had a month after his mother dies. The dream is detailed, violent and harsh, far from the romanticism of the other poets. It opens with "an alarm" raised in the middle of the night by a fox invading a nearby goose-farm (1). "The Fox," instead of a nostalgic and sentimental memory of his mother, addresses the violence and brutality of the feelings of unresolved grief within the poet and the narrator, who is grief stricken. He obviously feels that a violent and random act has taken place in his life, leaving him not only without his parent, but also without the person who comforts him as well. This random and violent act, the fox murdering the geese on a nearby farm, is an objective correlative, portraying the emotion felt regarding the situation. The frightening and sudden loss of his mother is depicted through the imagery of the fox murdering the geese one calm and unsuspecting evening. The scene formulates a very particular emotion, that of

helplessness when violence and randomness occurs, the feeling that accompanies death and loss, and its imagery is much more effective in communicating that emotion than any words poet could have used.

The image of the fox is borrowed from the Irish author James Joyce's book, *Ulysses*. In *Ulysses*, the protagonist, Stephen Dedelas, also suffers the loss of his mother in early adulthood. His grief is overwhelming and Stephen has difficulty "burying" mother: accepting the fact that she is permanently gone. Reflecting his unresolved grief, he tells a riddle one-day while teaching class. The class is boggled by the riddle, so Stephen explains that it is the fox burying his grandmother under a full moon. The private riddle, inexplicable to all but himself, is symbolic of Stephen's ability to finally "bury" his mother, to reckon with her death. Muldoon's own unresolved grief is reflected in his use of the fox in his poem.

Unlike the previous poets' tendency to idealize their parents into larger-than-life figures of the past, Muldoon portrays his parent in an image of a child, seemingly "engrossed as if... painfully writing your name with a carpenter's pencil" (17-20). The image appears wide-eyed and childlike, wearing a bib. She has been dead a month, and yet he sees her before him in the image of a child. He is disturbed when he awakes, not only by the noise arising from the nearby ruckus, but by the sudden remembrance of her, "three fields away/... in ground/ so wet you weren't so much/ buried there as drowned" 8-10). She is dead and yet ever-present, a child and yet an adult, much more ambiguous and complex than the portrait of parents displayed by Heaney and Boland. She is present as he opens the Venetian blinds, telling him to

return to bed. Not to worry. Her image is at once disturbing and reassuring, comforting, speaking to the poet as it did in life, urging the antagonist to "Go back to bed" (24). The image is at once childlike and parental, much more complex than the other poets' representation of their parents. It lacks the flatness of a legend, instead appearing multi-leveled. The same goes for the antagonist of the poem, who is at once childlike, being comforted by a memory of his mother, and adult, reckoning with loss and her death.

Muldoon does address themes common in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, however, as well. In "Lunch with Pancho Villa," a poem by Muldoon which recounts conversations with his father one afternoon, Muldoon writes of his father's perception of his poetry. He quotes his father as saying:

> Look, son. Just look around you.
> People are getting themselves killed
> Left, right and center
> While you do what? Write rondeaux?
> There's more to living in this country
> Than stars and horses, pigs and trees.
> Not that you'd guess it from your poems... (10-17).

Though Muldoon is not effected by his father's response the way Heaney is by his father's, it is evident that Muldoon still takes into consideration the nature of his poetry. Despite his father's perception of his poetry, Muldoon actually writes very politically, and is heavily concerned by the effect of the nature of his poetry, much in the way Yeats was. In "7, Middagh Street," Muldoon remembers the words of the famous Irish poet and answers his concerns:

> ...And were Yeats living in this hour

it should be in some ruined tower…
posturing, 'Did that play of mine
send out certain men (*certain* men?)
the English shot…?'
The answer is 'Certainly not.' (65-66, 73-78).

Bold in his response to Yeats, Muldoon explains that the need for independence and the action to achieve it are insatiable, and that it is ridiculous to question that "if Yeats had saved his pencil-lead / would certain men have stayed in bed?" This rather brash response to Yeats' poetry is indicative of Muldoon's ability to question the icons, heroes, and legends of former generations. He is not the romantic nostalgic that Heaney and Boland are, and when he confronts the greatness of Yeats, he is daring enough not only to answer his age-old question, but to do so with irritation, deeming the question ridiculous.

Muldoon's view of poetry is that those who are able to write it not only should, but must, due to a moral responsibility. As Boland believes her poetry, in conjunction with her being a mother, leaves a mark in history, Muldoon conveys that even the simplest arts are in and of themselves political gestures. His argument that "poetry can make things happen- / not only can, but must" portrays his respect for the occupation (11-12),. This portrayal of the art form as a force in history may even derive from the ideal of the Irish artist, as is present in the poetry of Muldoon and Heaney.

Muldoon defiantly uses this art form which "not only can, but must" make things happen to reveal what he considers as the sad truths of nationalism. His poem, "Aisling," in all its stark reality, is quite a contrast to the nostalgia and patriotism present in the poetry of Heaney and Boland. He, in fact, does away with all "forms of sentimentality and idealization" (Kendall 95).

The term *aisling* means:

> dream or vision; during the poet's vision the unearthly woman Cathleen ni Houlihan, a personification of Ireland, would appear, and as both mother and lover, would demand that her men rise up and free her from suffering... (95)

In Muldoon's "Aisling," however, Cathleen ni Houlihan is not "Aurora, or the goddess Flora,/ ...or Venus bright," an idealized and beautiful version of the woman in the legend (6-7). Rather, she is a woman who confronts the poet in a snow drift, a real person present and affected by the elements of nature.

The Irishman sent to rescue her, later revealed in the poem, is not the heroic stout-necked image that Boland so often condemned in her poetry. Instead, Muldoon portrays him as one of the hunger strikers in Belfast, supported by "a kidney machine... a saline drip into his bag of brine" (12,15). He makes clear the slow and quiet suffering that has just been "called off," his starvation and kidney damage making no impact on the freedom of Northern Ireland. No sentimentality appears in Muldoon's rendition of the dream-vision.

"It's all much of a muchness," Muldoon writes describing the insanity of people suffering to death for the sake of nation, the stupidity of starving for a division in land. He views the needless dying for the sake of something as intangible and, essentially, irrelevant as *a nation* as ridiculous as the idea of Yeats questioning whether his poetry had caused violence. His distorted image of the heroine of the story reveals his lack of sentimentality towards the traditional representation of the woman in Irish legend as well as in poetry. Muldoon falls into Boland's battle grounds here by allowing what has traditionally been the object of aislings, Cathleen ni Houlihan, to become a subject- *a real person*.

The hunger striker in the poem, who essentially is "betraying the fanatical commands of his republican vision..." by submitting to the hospitalization is in the Royal Victoria Hospital, being "nursed back to health in what is- nominally at least- enemy territory" (96). Muldoon's presentation of the paradoxical situation of the hunger striker is a parallel to the poet's own feelings toward the violence in Ireland. His views expressed in "7, Middaugh Street," when he argues that "poetry can make things happen- / not only can, but must" directly contradict his portrayal of the movement for independence as senseless. Yet he addresses themes common to those in Ireland who are moving towards sociological equality, like Boland. His themes, unmistakably ambiguous, represent the ambivalence common to Muldoon's generation in the scheme of a changing Ireland.

CONCLUSION

Eavan Boland, Seamus Heaney, and Paul Muldoon, all Irish poets, is the emergence of a new era of political writers in their nation. Each one has becomes a political poet by a different means: one from the position of a woman who has investigated the wrongdoings of women in her family before her, one who is a poetic echo of Yeats, one who was pushed into the spotlight by his admiring public. The commonality of these poets are the key to understanding them, however, as their portrayals of themselves as children and parents are essential in examining them as a group.

The influences of every nation's past are phenomenal on all its citizens, of course, but this is especially evident in those who express their sentiments with the written word. Even unconsciously, writers saturate their writings with feelings towards the historic past and their nation's consciousness. This is similarly true, of course, with the domestic life of poets: influences not even knowingly present can be the basis of many of their expressions, which is illustrated in the difference in writings between Boland who lived in Southern Ireland, and Heaney and Muldoon who witnessed the violence of the North.

What is critical at this point is to not merely sweep this awareness of the infiltration of nation and family under the rug. In fact, if any influences as prominent as these, even when they appear unrelated, can be analyzed side by side, an opportunity to grasp a deeper sense of a national unconscious is available. It is at the intersection of such entities as nation and poet, poet and parent, nation and woman that

the depths of a cultural conscious become appreciated. Only when these criteria are examined in accordance with one another can new discoveries be made about topics, like the movement for independence, which have been explored for years. Where concepts most vital to poets overlap, art catalyzes, forming a new type of political poetry that is not only flawed with outside stimuli, but is closer to the voice that initiates rebellion.

NOTES

1 from "This Moment," In a Time of Violence

2 from "Anna Liffey," In a Time of Violence

3 from "Anna Liffey," In a Time of Violence

4 from "Moths," In a Time of Violence

5 from "What Language Did," In a Time of Violence

6 from "A Woman Painted on a Leaf," In a Time of Violence

7 from the *Louis* section of 7, Middaugh Street

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VITA

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